

77th Heroes in Hand to Hand Battles With the Foe in Lorraine



THE CLUB HOUSE WHICH THE 77th DIVISION PROPOSES TO BUILD AT A COST OF \$5,000,000.

Their First Days in the Front Line Trenches Proved the Valor of New York City's Own—Then On Into the Crucible of the Vesle They Won More Honors in Open Warfare

This is the second of a series of three narratives of the overseas adventures of New York City's Own, the Seventy-seventh Division, by Lieut. Arthur McKeogh, formerly of THE EVENING SUN editorial staff. He tells how the selective service men proved themselves real fighters in their first days in the front line trenches and relates many instances of individual heroism. Then he takes the reader to "The Hell Hole" of the Vesle Valley where the division gained more glory in battles of a major scale.

By ARTHUR McKEOGH, Former Lieutenant of 308th Infantry, U. S. A.

IMAGINE yourself in the professional tourist's business. Some one comes to you with this proposition:

"I want to take a little party of 22,000 men sightseeing over France. The trip will cover, roughly, 350 miles. These chaps of mine are not averse to walking a little—in fact, they're trained to spurn the highway under foot and, at the same time, carry their own bedrooms and kitchens. So we'll let them stroll about twenty-five miles before and after the Pullman reservations. I want this done within ten days. These fellows, you see, have an engagement, so to speak, waiting them. Can you handle the job?"

You would probably gasp like the mouth of a mine at the magnitude of it. Not so G-4, Amex Forces. G-4 is one of five subdivisions of the General Staff. It is composed of officers whose business is troop movements for combat, evacuation of wounded, operations of the S. O. S. (Service of Supply), &c. To the A. E. F. had its G-4 at Chaumont, Gen. Pershing's headquarters, so every divisional staff and a similar subordinate group.

Thus, when Uncle Sam—sightseer, souvenir seeker and scraper—decided to move the Seventy-seventh Division from the north of France, where the training period had been spent in Flanders and the Somme, far to the southeast, it was like telling G-4 to transplant a fair sized community with all its household goods over 350 miles.

Too Big to Visualize.

I wish I could visualize such a troop movement for the reader, to whom it can mean little to say that on June 9 the 307th and 308th Regiments entered at Longpre, or that about that time the 306th and 306th were being moved by rail from France. To explain, however, that Longpre and Heaer are twenty-five miles apart indicates that in France a division covers considerable ground. Its mobility depends on rail facilities. The Transportation Corps estimates that forty-nine trains of fifty cars each are needed to move a division. Let the statistician calculate how far short 2,450 cars, laid bumper to bumper, would fall of reaching the moon. In the Baccarat sector, in Lorraine, to which we were going, our divisional area was spread out at one time over twenty square kilometers, or twelve and a half square miles, in which by actual count on my map there were thirty-one villages for billeting.

Picture, then, early in June, this flood of khaki streaming over the countryside by different routes, marching fifteen to twenty kilometers a day; quartered in a score of villages one night, in another score the next; setting up dozens of rolling kitchens for a few hours; finding drinking water, since many of the French had a habit of locking up their fountains; caring for tender feet; invading madame's barns and guest rooms for the night; setting billeting accounts the next morning, one franc an officer, five centimes a man, and off again over the roads and their cocoa powder, or more probably their mud.

Possibly an enumeration of the various types of soldier in a combat division—12,500 of them only being

counted as "bayonets"—will afford an idea of its complex traffic.

Figures on an American Division.

1 Engineer Regt.	626
1 Engineer Train	53
1 Field Signal Battalion	464
2 Sanitary Squads	54
1 Mobile Laboratory	5
1 Division Headquarters	153
1 Hospital Train & Military Police	328
1 Supply Train	322
1 Motor Ambulance Train	292
1 Horse Ambulance Train	557
2 Motor Ambulance Companies	257
4 Camp Infirmaries	8
1 Motor Field Hospital	180
1 Bakery Company	101
1 Butchery Company	57
2 Base Hospitals	666
2 Infantry Brigades with 3 Machine Gun Battalions (3 companies each)	16,372
1 Artillery Brigade with 1 Trench Mortar Battery	4,669
1 Ordnance Mobile Repair Shop	43
2 Ambulance Companies	319
1 Field Hospital	122
1 Laundry	174
1 Light Tank Company	174
Total	27,063

And, finally, if you would attempt grasping the huge proportions of field operations in modern warfare, remember that a single division, big though it be, is to the whole force engaged merely like a squad of eight men to a company of 250. In the Meuse-Argonne offensive, as has been said, no fewer than twenty-one American divisions were engaged, eight of them put into the front line twice. And against us the Boche used forty!

While the infantry was trekking for Lorraine, the 152d Field Artillery Brigade pulled up stakes at Souge, near Bordeaux, where, under the French, they had a month of training. Brest had been their landing place early in May. We learned later, to the accompaniment of the choice commandments that a doughboy makes of the signing of the armistice, which the New York artillerymen had swanked in a big Fourth of July parade in Bordeaux just before entraining.

Before we had been holding the line long our own runners were supporting us—the 304th and 305th Field Artillery, with 75s; the 306th with the "heavies," or 155s. Their equipment was completely French, and because of differences in French and American artillery methods they had to unlearn nearly everything that they had learned in the States. Parenthetically, it may surprise many to know that every gun in the A. E. F. of these types—the real barrage layers of the war—was French, with the pathetic exception of 109 75s. For all our munition plants in this country there were, according to Gen. Pershing, only 109 American made 75s in France at the signing of the armistice. Which is another commentary, surely, on the ancient shibboleth of a "million men sprung to arms overnight."

Baccarat Is Unforgettable.

What officer of the Seventy-seventh will ever forget Baccarat, division headquarters, on the Meuse, with its officers' club—its *Reunion des Officiers*! Or the piping sing song of the post waiter as he threaded his way from group to group around the pool tables, hurrying over his shoulder to his comrades at the serving counter the demands: "Trois peck! Cig peck!" Peck was his own Gallic abbreviation of a beverage called "pick me up," a concoction of champagne and orange juice, in universal favor.

It was in this room, gay with proud cambric flags, that many an officer saw his friends of another regiment for the last time. For at no place in the endless rush of subsequent fighting was it possible to meet so many men of other organizations as in the quiet Baccarat sector of the Vosges Mountains in Lorraine.

Of course at that time, new to the front, we could have imagined a second time. For at no place in the war were we not exactly underimpressed by the fact that we were the first National Army unit in all history to take over front line trenches.

Jerry—I have no explanation for that nickname—was impressed, too,

So much so that to test the calibre of these citizen soldiers he was moving a Hindenburg "travelling circus"—crack raiders—opposite our front even as we were taking over.

We relieved the Forty-second, or Rainbow Division, and the Sixty-first French. The 305th was the first to go in, on the night of June 17. For a while the French remained in the line with us. The front was extensive and the trenches lightly manned, for both Jerry and "frog" (our boys did not so term the pollus in derision) considered this sector a rest area. There seemed to be a tacit agreement between them that only a pretence at the amenities of trench life would be observed—patrols, observation, &c. Peronne, for instance, our battalion headquarters, was not to be shelled as long as Bremnil, known to the corresponding Boche "HQ," was untouched.

A Placid Truce Broken.

It is improbable, therefore, that the placid interchange of harassing artillery fire or occasional patrol clashes would have been disturbed had not the German high command known that the first of America's selective troops were about to submit themselves to the baptism of fire. The Boche intelligence service was surely aware of our entry. While I cannot state it as a fact personally verified, some of our men asserted that following the relief a Boche observation balloon exposed a pennant bearing this inscription:

GOOD-BYE—42!
WELCOME—77!

The Germans had good sources of information in the Vosges Mountains. Practically opposite the border of Lorraine and Alsace we were in a country where spies might be expected to operate. The French themselves prohibited civilians from visiting their homes in the immediate vicinity of the line. This is not to impugn the loyalty of the natives, but merely to point out that near a region whose Germanization had been attempted for decades one might well be careful. In Neuf Maison, 308th Regimental Headquarters, omelots, vin rouge and peasants flourished—within four miles of the trenches. And the Boche considered the soil fertile for the sowing of propaganda. Frequently his avions flew over to release yellow parachutes weighted and brought to earth by bundles of newspapers printed in French.

Somewhat of their aviators had undisputed superiority. One day a plane ventured as far back as division headquarters, fifteen kilometers back of the line. It was brought down by the "archies," the first and last airplane I ever saw winged by anti-aircraft fire. And at a barrage were commences to the doughboys. The two occupants of this plane were mashed so that not even a torso could be distinguished.

The Propaganda Sheets.

Half an hour earlier these fellows had been dropping propaganda parachutes. Two of their papers I obtained, one an eight page magazine excellently printed by rotogravure process, entitled "L'Anglais Tel Qu'il Est" (What the Englishman Really Is). Profusely illustrated with caricatures of John Bull, "the insatiable octopus of colonies," Joan of Arc at the stake, Daniel O'Connell and Sir Roger Casement, these sheets were palatable—Tactically palpable—incendiaries of French antagonism toward their ally.

While no one in New York knew that their "own" were actually in the fight, every newspaper carried conspicuously that day the following communiqué:

BREUIL (via London), June 24.—German troops in an attack on trenches in the Badonviller region (southeast of Luneville), occupied



MARKERS TO BE PLACED ON WOODEN CROSSES OVER THE LAST RESTING PLACES OF 77th DIVISION FIGHTERS BURIED IN FRANCE.

by French and Americans, inflicted heavy losses and brought back prisoners, according to the official communication from headquarters to-day. The bulletin reads:

"East of Badonviller shock troops penetrated the Franco-American trenches and inflicted heavy losses. They brought back forty prisoners."

In the historical records of the Chief of Staff's office in Washington there appears this entry in connection with the raid:

"After heavy bombardment along front line positions between Chemois and Neuville, an enemy force estimated strength of about one battalion attacked our post north of Neuville and post at Badonviller. Little activity on part of our machine guns. Same applied to machine guns of enemy. Activity our trench mortars, none. Great activity on part of enemy artillery, 3,000 210 mm. shells, split between high explosives, shrapnel, mustard and phosphene gas, between 3 and 7 A. M."

Returning A. E. F.ers, though they

exhausted the dictionary, can give no adequate description of what it means to be in the thick of a barrage in which twelve big calibre shells of all varieties are breaking at five second intervals for four successive hours.

What a Box Barrage Means.

The Boche put down box barrages—

or fire on three sides of a square—to cut off reinforcements—at two points, Neuville, where the 207th was holding, and Badonviller, our regimental front. In raids of this kind for half an hour before the attackers arrive every foot of the trench objective is hammered and pulverized by the fiercest fire. Gas chokes and blinds the men; dugouts collapse and bury them; shrapnel lags their flesh; H E scatters their limbs.

Human nerves must withstand all this, and among their dead the survivors must prepare for worse—badly

denly stopped dropping on us, and we could hear them going over our heads. It was at this point that the Hun appeared and the men started to greet him. One man especially, Corporal Patrick Hendricks, who was given the D. S. C. and afterward killed in action, did wonderful work with his automatic rifle and accounted for a good many of them.

"I think we would have been all right if they had attacked us only on the front, but evidently the Frenchmen on my right were pretty well torn up. The Germans must have gotten in on them first, and then continued against my right flank. Of course I realized that we were done for, as I could see that they greatly outnumbered us. But we were there to hold the position to the last man. We did."

"Finally they managed to get into the trenches with us, and then the thing became a hand to hand fight—kicking, biting, stabbing, scratching, anything to get the other fellow first. I found myself in a turn in the trench with my sergeant, Frank Wagner, and my runner, Private Dietrich, behind me. Six of the Boches started down the trench toward us, waving their 'potato mashers' (German hand grenades).

"I shot the first two, but the third one in the meantime threw his grenade. As he did I jumped around the

turn and yelled to the others to 'look out!' The grenade hit the wall of the trench behind me and dropped between my feet. I looked down, saw it and jumped, drawing both legs up under me. At that moment it exploded and tore off the right foot about six inches below the knee, the leather of my shoe holding the foot on. On both my legs it cut me up pretty well."

The Melting Pot Vindicated.

"Fragments of the same grenade

hit Wagner in the neck and Dietrich in the arm and foot. The remaining four Germans rushed on us then and went through our clothes, taking everything we had. While they were at it a little Italian, Rocco Rocco, came up the other end of the trench and started after the four of them with his bayonet. One of them threw a grenade which exploded under him and he died a few days later.

"The fighting kept up a little while longer, when the Huns evidently thought help was coming up to us. Because they suddenly became greatly excited and started back with their booty and prisoners.

"As nearly as I can make out we had fourteen killed, sixteen wounded, four of whom died, and twelve taken

prisoners, one of whom died and nearly all severely wounded. The men who fought exceedingly well were Sergeants Wagner, Maroney (both D. S. C. men) and Herold (died of wounds); Corporals McKee (died of wounds), Higgins, Hendricks (D. S. C.), McBride and Privates Dietrich, John Sullivan, Patrick Sullivan and Rocco.

Please think of those names in combination when the achievements of the Seventy-seventh are extolled. Here were the peoples of the earth banded together for the vindication of a single, stanch, universal principle—in last analysis that all men are created equal. And they had a vital consciousness of that ideal. To those names, speaking not for New York alone, but for all Americans, answered as nothing else could have answered the question then uppermost in the German autocratic mind: "How will these hybrid swine—the drafted soldiers—fight?"

How fight?

As Sullivan fought—with his hands alone—just before his captors thought they could drag him prisoner into their trenches. His body was recovered near their wire, mine bayonet thrusts through it.

As Rocco fought, one against four,

with his bayonet fixed at "high port," then at "on guard," just as he had learned it at Camp Upton—his bayonet against their grenades!

It was so that the Yanks—your own, New York Yanks—fought, cleanly, fearlessly and against what kind of opponent? Against offerings of brutality who flew low in planes over the trenches that morning, after the raiders had withdrawn, pouring machine gun bullets and dropping bombs upon the tortured wounded.

"I had enough strength to move my arm to an aviator in a sort of 'cease firing' signal as I lay in the bottom of the trench," Lieut. Flood told me afterward in the hospital. "What's the use of that? I wanted to yell to him. 'We're all through here!' He saw the movement and flew closer, his bullets kicking dirt off the parapet into my eyes."

That was typical of German "courage." It was courage of the same ilk

that they displayed—seven of them—after robbing Vanderlip, already wounded in four places. They shot him again.

Division's Primary School.

It is not surprising that veteran German troops were superior at raiding in the Baccarat sector, which really served as the division's primary school of front line experience. The price paid was not excessive, although the criticism was heard that the sudden change from British to French automatic rifles and bombs deprived the men of an effectiveness and confidence in repulsing the enemy which would have been theirs with the old familiar weapons.

One raid, executed by Company B, 307th Infantry, upon the German line at Barriade du Carrefour, south of Montreux, ended disastrously for our attackers. It was a daylight raid, without artillery, led by Capt. F. Blanton Barrett, formerly a reporter for the New York Tribune. With fifty-two men and a Lieutenant, Capt. Barrett left our trenches at 2 o'clock on Sunday afternoon, July 21.

Crossing No Man's Land and penetrating the Boche were apparently consumed time sufficient for the Boche, who saw the party coming, to lay a hasty yet elaborate ambush. So complete were his preparations that as our forces dropped noiselessly into the enemy trenches—having met not a single shot of resistance up to that point—a single blast pierced the quiet. It was almost "stagger." From the left flank and front a hail of grenades and rifle fire showered upon the raiders. Again the bugle—as a signal this time for the machine guns. From right, left and front four heavy guns opened with streams of frontal and enfilading fire. The raiders had walked into an empty stretch of trench sown at every foot with death.

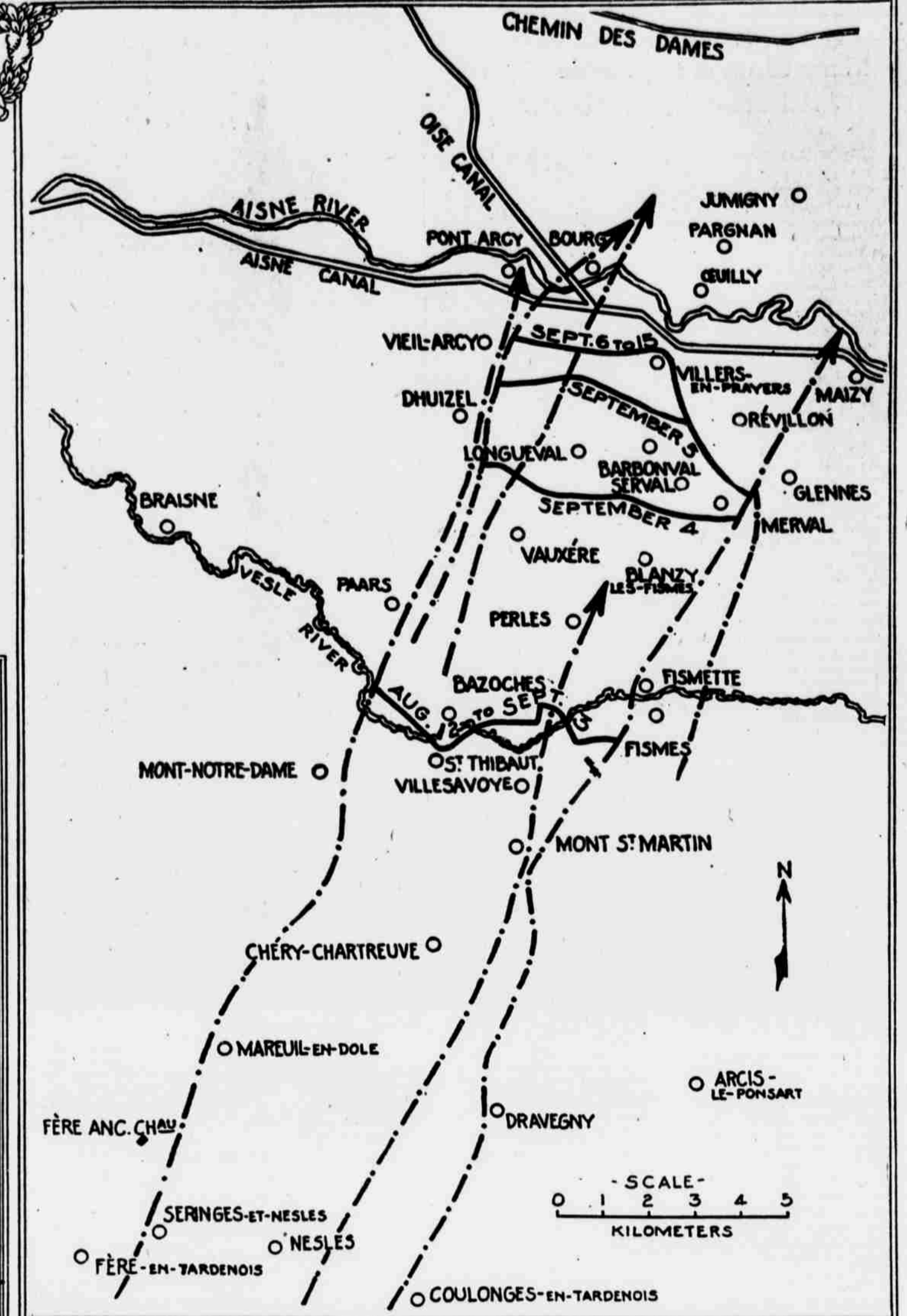
That they fought to the last was attested by the fact that practically the entire detachment was wiped out after an hour's engagement. Capt. Barrett, it was learned afterward from German prisoners, was buried with full military courtesies at Chirey-sur-Vesouze, behind the German lines.

How Capt. Mills Died.

Another officer whose loss was keenly felt was Capt. Philip Mills of Company G, 308th, a former All American football star and New York clubman. He was conducting rifle grenade practice, rear of the line, when a grenade exploded prematurely, bursting the

tomb, or grenade holder affixed to

Continued on Following Page.



MAP of the 77th DIVISION in the OISE-AISNE OFFENSIVE
© by 77th DIVISION ASS'N.